

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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R 021531Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8932

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 5082

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT SY

SUBJ: PRIME MINISTER-DESIGNATE CONTINUES CONSULTATIONS TO
FORM NEW CABINET

REF: DAMASCUS 5036

1. AUG 2 SYRIAN MEDIA REPORTED THAT MAJOR GENERAL
ABD AL-RAHMAN KHULAYFAWI WAS CONTINUING HIS CONSULTA-
TIONS TO FORM NEW CABINET. CAPSULE BIOGRAPHY PUBLISHED
IN PRESS NOTED KHULAYFAWI'S RE-ELECTION TO BAATH PARTY
REGIONAL COMMAND AT SIXTH PARTY CONGRESS. HE WAS APPOINTED
INTERIOR MINISTER IN 1970, AND FORMED HIS FIRST CABINET
ON APRIL 4, 1971. HE SERVED AS PRIME MINISTER UNTIL
DECEMBER 1972, WHEN HE RESIGNED FOR REASONS OF HEALTH.
HE PRESENTLY HEADS ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL OFFICE OF
REGIONAL COMMAND AND IS MEMBER OF PROGRESSIVE NATIONAL
FRONT (PNF) CENTRAL COUNCIL.

2. TISHRIIN REPORTED CABINET CHANGE WITHIN CONTEXT OF
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CARIOUS REPRESENTATIVE INSTITUTIONS ESTABLISHED BY

PRES ASAD, INCLUDING BAATH PARTY COMMAND, PNF AND PEOPLE'S COUNCIL (PARLIAMENT). REITERATING NEED FOR DOMESTIC AND PAN-ARAB SOLIDARITY, TISHRIIN REVIEWED SYRIAN OPPOSITION TO SINAI AGREEMENT AND INITIATIVE TO SETTLE LEBANESE CRISIS. NOTING THAT AYYUBI HAD SHOULDERED THESE BURDENS, TISHRIIN EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT KHULAYFAWI'S CABINET WOULD PICK UP THE BURDEN. PROVIDING SIGNIFICANT CLUE AS TO THRUST OF MANDATE ASAD HAD BESTOWED UPON KHULAYFAWI, TISHRIIN REPORTED THAT "ARAB MASSES IN SYRIA HOPE NEW CABINET WILL DEVOTE LARGE PORTION OF ITS INTEREST TO DOMESTIC SITUATION IN SYRIA IN ORDER TO DISPOSE OF SOME PROBLEMS THAT OBSTRUCTED OUR ONWARD MARCH."

3. COMMENT: NAMES OF CABINET MINISTERS NOT YET DIVULGED, BUT EXPECTED WITHIN 2-3 DAYS. SUGGESTION THAT NEW CABINET WILL DEVOTE ITS ENERGIES TO PRESSING DOMESTIC PROBLEMS WILL BE WELCOMED BY PUBLIC CONCERNED ABOUT SLOWDOWN IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, BUREAUCRATIC SNARLS AND HEIGHTENED CORRUPTION WHICH FLOURISHED UNDER AYYUBI'S REIGN. KHULAYFAWI HAS REPUTATION FOR INCORRUPTIBILITY THAT FIVE-PERCENTERS WITHIN AND OUTSIDE OF GOVERNMENT WILL FIND INTIMIDATING; WHILE WE DO NOT FORESEE AN END TO "ORIENTAL MEDIATION" WITHIN SARG BUREAUCRACY, IT WILL PROBABLY NOT BE AS EXTENSIVE NOR AS OPEN AS IN THE PAST.

4. KHULAYFAWI'S HEALTH, WHICH APPARENTLY DID PLAY PRIMARY ROLE IN CAUSING HIS RESIGNATION IN 1972, IS REPORTEDLY NO LONGER A SERIOUS PROBLEM. BRITISH INFORMED US THAT HE HAS FULLY RECOVERED FROM HIS BOUT WITH RECTAL CANCER THROUGH SERVICES OF BRITISH DOCTORS IN LONDON. SYRIANS WE HAVE TALKED WITH ABOUT HIS HEALTH ALSO BELIEVE HIS POLITICAL ACTIVITIES NO LONGER IMPAIRED BY POOR HEALTH.

5. ASAD'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF KHULAYFAWI APPOINTMENT RESPONSIVE TO GENUINE DOMESTIC CONCERN ABOUT ECONOMIC DRIFT AND BUREAUCRATIC CORRUPTION. FOLLOWING LONG-AWAITED SPEECH TO NATION WHICH ADDRESSED PUBLIC CONCERNS ABOUT SYRIAN ROLE IN LEBANON AND SYRO-PALESTINIAN AGREEMENT WHICH RELIEVED PRESSURE ON REGIME FROM THOSE WHO OPPOSED CONFRONTATION WITH PALESTINIANS, ASAD HAS DEMON-
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STRATED HIS RESPONSIVENESS TO WIDELY-SHARED PUBLIC SENTIMENTS. FORMATION OF CABINET LED BY PRIME MINISTER EXPERIENCED IN DEALING WITH DOMESTIC PROBLEMS WILL PERMIT ASAD TO MAINTAIN HIS FOCUS ON RESOLVING SYRIA'S INCREASINGLY COMPLEX FOREIGN AFFAIRS ISSUES.
MURPHY

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